

My First Half-Century in the Iron Game

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While it is probably not quite impossible, it is highly unlikely that you will ever have a truly “original” idea. While many of your ideas seem to be original, it is almost certain that somebody, somewhere, sometime had exactly the same idea. Most of which ideas are never recorded, few of which are ever acted upon, the result being that many very good ideas are lost in the shuffle of life. How many? Who knows; after all, how do we count the things that we failed to notice?

But even when things do get noticed it does not follow that they are ever truly understood by anybody, or even by many people. Damned few, if any, of the ideas being put forward today in the field of exercise are truly original. The photo to the right shows a group of four people who had about three-hundred years of collective experience in the field of exercise when that picture was taken, about ten years ago. Mable and Perry Reader established Ironman magazine in 1936, and then published tens-of-thousands of articles on the subject of exercise over a period of about fifty years; the oldest man in the picture, Milo Steinborn, who was then more than ninety years old, was the last then surviving member of the old-time, original German Strongmen.



The youngest person in the picture, “youngest” being a relative term, was me, and I then had nearly fifty years of experience with exercise.

Among the four of us, at one time or another, we had seen and heard just about anything that you could think of on the subject of exercise, and had tried most of these ideas if they at least appeared sane, and sometimes when they did not appear to be sane.

And while I have been interested in, and directly involved with, exercise for fifty-seven years, that has not been my only interest: I have also been a pilot for fifty-six years, have served as a pilot in command for a total of more than 30,000 hours in everything from big jets to helicopters, and damned near anything else that will fly, and sometimes with things that failed to fly. Secondly, I was involved in the animal business for many years all over the world, importing tens-of-thousands of large exotic animals, millions of smaller animals and tens-of-millions of tropical fish.

This photo on the following page is one of my big jets just before it landed on my private airport north of Ocala, Florida, in 1984 with 63 African elephants on board, following a nonstop flight from an island off the west coast of Africa. In the background are two more of my big jets parked on the side of the runway, airplanes that were primarily used for hauling doctors and therapists to medical seminars that we conducted in cooperation with the School of Medicine of the University of Florida.

Those 63 elephants were added to a private collection of exotic animals that then included thousands of crocodiles, thousands of snakes, rhinos, an adult gorilla and many other animals and reptiles.

Knowledge gained from my experiences with both flying and animals added a great deal of value to my interest in exercise, and it is now my firm opinion that most people suffer from the effects of a much too narrow focus of interest. It is neither necessary nor desirable to devote our entire life to any one subject; on the contrary, if you do so you will almost certainly limit your ability to learn anything of value.

The Arthur Jones Collection



From my “hands-on” experience with flying, I gained a clear understanding of many of the simple laws of basic physics that are involved with exercise: what is torque? What is a moment arm? What are the results of impact force? What happens when you suddenly change direction of movement? These and many similar points are seldom understood by people involved with exercise; yet, in fact, without such understanding it is simply impossible to know what you are doing.

From my study of animals I became aware of the fact that very little in the way of exercise is required for building enormous levels of strength and muscular size. How do you like the muscular size of a gorilla? Or a lion? Yet, both gorillas and lions actually perform almost no exercise or hard physical activity. But, when they do work, they work very hard ... but very briefly, and not very often.

If it works for a lion or a gorilla, why shouldn't it work equally well for a man. Well, in fact, it does work well for a man.

An adult male lion can get over a ten-foot-high fence with a 500-pound cow in his mouth. At a bodyweight of more than 500 pounds a gorilla can perform a one-armed “chin up” so easily that he appears to weigh nothing. A wrist that measures more than eight inches on a man is huge, and nine inches is unbelievably large, yet my gorilla had wrists that measured more than thirteen inches, larger than most bodybuilders' forearms at the largest place. His neck was over forty inches in size.

I strongly suspect that if you exercise a lion or a gorilla as much as many bodybuilders train that you would probably kill them, and it is certainly obvious that they do not “need” that much exercise. Neither do you; and even if you can “stand” it, it does not follow that you “need” it.

Go to the gym, perform your workout properly, then get away from the gym and forget it until time for your next workout; talking about exercise, reading about exercise, literally “living” exercise will do nothing in the way of improving your results.

Before you try anything else in the way of attempting to improve your results from exercise, try doing “less” exercise; not more, less. If and when that simple point worms itself into your brain, then I have probably taught you the most important thing that you will ever learn about exercise.